II

BACKGROUND

The Blackfeet Reservation, with headquarters in Browning, Montana, lies for the most part in Glacier County with a small portion on the south and east extending into Ponderosa County, Montana. Most of the Reservation is on the eastern side of Glacier National Park in northwest Montana adjacent to the province of Alberta, Canada. Miles of green range and farmlands fan out from the base of the Rockies to form the Reservation which covers a tract of land 52 by 58 miles (see Figures 1 and 2).

The Reservation is served by rail and air and both local and national bus lines, as well as several local and transcontinental trucking lines. A network of Federal, State and local highways provides ready access to the important markets of Great Falls, Shelby and Havre, Montana. A full range of utilities is available on the Reservation - telephones, a plentiful water supply, and natural gas from gas fields in nearby Montana and Alberta. Only the larger communities of Browning and Cut Bank have adequate sewer systems. Electricity is supplied by a cooperative electric company from power developed at the Fort Peck Dam in eastern Montana. Approximately 2,000 kilowatt hours of power are available on the western side of the Reservation with considerably more on the eastern side.

The average rainfall measures 14.4 inches per year in the Browning area and 13.8 inches in the lower and eastern parts of the Reservation. Annual snowfall is approximately 63 inches. Mean temperatures range from 19° F. above zero in January to 61° in July. Frost has been reported as late as May 19 and as early as July 16 during the last seventy years. The major part of the Reservation is subject to strong and persistent westerly winds which are usually more severe during the early spring months. Generally the climate on the Reservation is of the semiarid type. The average growing season for irrigated crops is approximately 120 days. While the economy on the Reservation revolves largely around agriculture, significant raw materials are available in and under the land surface. Oil and natural gas are found in the eastern portion of the Reservation's well known Cut Bank oil fields. The Choteau iron deposit extends from the foot of the Rockies over the western half of the Reservation. Its titanium content is approximately 12 percent and the iron content is from 30-40 percent. Coal reserves are estimated at approximately 50,000,000 short tons. Abundant recreational facilities are available for outdoor activities. The many lakes offer boating, swimming and fishing. There is big game and upland bird hunting during certain seasons of the year. The Blackfeet Tribe recognizes the value of this important tribal property with respect to its potential for future development. It represents 1,500,000 acres of gently rolling plain between 3,500 and 4,500 feet above sea level.

The population of the Blackfeet Reservation in 1960 was 4,900. Approximately 50 percent (800) of the adult males on the Reservation have been classified as skilled or semiskilled workers. An almost equal percentage of adult females, 60 percent (300), are likewise categorized. Wage rates for males in manufacturing areas have reached $2.21 per hour while female employment rates

20: Hungry Wolf I-4,5 (no date) 1980
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Blood

used commercial oil paints on this tipi, because the old-time earth paints of my ancestors are scarce and hard to find, especially certain colors, such as yellow. Around the bottom of the tipi we painted a wide black band with rounded projections, which symbolized the hills near the streams that otters live in. For this and the night sky we could have used charcoal mixed with grease and warm water, but we kept the painting uniform by using oils throughout. At the time we didn't know that this would make the cover twice as heavy as the original canvas. However, it also made this one of the warmest and most waterproof tipis around.

Before my new tipi was ready for camping I had to sew the lining curtains that hang from the poles around the inside. I had no idea how important this job would be. As a result I just sewed together two long rectangles of canvas from what was left over after I made the tipi cover. Ponah and Mokakin loaned us an old one of these liners with pictographic drawings of war stories, so I figured we were all set.

By the way, you may be wondering why I say "my tipi." One of our ancestral traditions is that the tipi and its household contents belong to the woman. If she splits up with her husband, he is left out in the cold, though he usually goes to stay with relatives or friends. The tipi design is transferred to the husband and wife together, but the cover that it's painted on still belongs to her.

Getting the tipi poles to camp is usually the biggest problem of the whole move. Those who are lucky enough to have a good wagon that can be pulled by a vehicle find themselves imposed on a lot. Mokakin has such a wagon, and I've known it to pull six or seven sets of tipi poles to camp over a few days' time. Most poles are at least thirty feet long, and there are generally about twenty poles to a set, so that becomes quite an awkward and heavy load. Still, a number of people manage to tie their pole sets to the tops of their half-ton trucks and get them to camp—generally by the reserve's back

roads, to avoid the frowning policemen on the highway. Sometimes the vehicles used for moving to camp are so overloaded that they barely come limping into camp, especially if they contain all the camping gear, the family and its kids, and a couple of neighbors-on-foot thrown in, besides.

Mokakin and my father helped us to set up our tipi that first time we used it. Usually several men from the same part of the camp circle pitch in to get each other's lodges set up. Nowadays the women seldom even supervise anymore, much less do they put up the lodges like they used to. I always hear the men arguing over how each step should be done, and I am told that the operation went much more smoothly back when the women did it.

That first tipi set up very nicely, as most of the ones my mother makes do. But as soon as I started my work on the inside I discovered something that I had done wrong. In sewing my linings as rectangles I didn't take into account that the tipi is narrower toward the top than at the bottom. Since the linings hang like an inside skirt, mine were kind of stretched in odd shapes up to the main cord, tied from pole to pole, to which they were attached. Also, the linings were not long enough to go all the way around the tipi's inside. Toward the door we had only the tipi poles and the outside cover, which was like being in a house and having only the wall studs and the outside covering, without insulation or inside walls. My grandmothers kept their homes very simple, so that you can't really take away anything at all and still have an efficient unit. We had some very cold drafts coming into our tipi during our first camping experience in it.

It took two pickup truck loads to haul all our gear to the Sun Dance camp. My mother laughed about it and told me how easily and practically her grandmother always packed. In the years since then I have realized that it takes time to learn how to do these things right, even if they are part of a supposedly simple life-style. That is one of the challenges

101 Blood Reserve. Across the Belly River, adjacent to the community of Stand-off is the Stand-off colony of Hutterites, and on the south end of the St. Mary River Reservoir is an- 177 other larger Hutterite colony. Each of the colonies performs some services for the Indians, selling them produce and repairing broken machinery. The Hutterites also farm leased land on the Reserve and meet their Indian neighbors in the surrounding towns and villages.

207 [206] Today face to face personal communication is supplemented by television and radio as well as the telephone and telegraph. All of these sources are available to the contemporary Blood. Lethbridge has two commercial radio stations and a television station which broadcasts entertainment and [365] news. Radios and television sets are available to the Indian population, and, as the Reserve is nearly totally electri- 206 fied, they are widely in evidence. Telephones are not gener- [365] ally available on the Reserve, but all of the schools, government facilities, and the general store are so equipped. The local telegraph station is in the Canadian Pacific Railway terminal in Cardston, located on the railroad right-of-way on the Blood Reserve.

● 494 [491] The Blood seem to prefer the face-to-face mode of communication, however, and today people travel near and far by auto on the Provincial highways or the graveled roads 484 maintained by the Blood Band. The favored vehicle for 493